



[« back](#)

How to De-Stress Your Life

By Dr. Rob

type size: [\[A\]](#) [\[A\]](#) [\[A\]](#)

[Dr. Rob's](#) interesting article on [stress management](#) shows you how to manage and [reduce your stress](#) and to give yourself some much needed stress relief.

If I looked up the word "stress" in the dictionary, I'd probably see the pictures of two terrific nurses, Anita and Diana. I happened to see them one day and wow! — I saw that Anita had a tension headache and an upper-back muscle stiffness that was harder than her desk, while Diana seemed to have chewed her fingernails down to the quick. Needless to say, both women, who are also mothers and wives, are suffering from an overabundance of stress.

All of us have experienced the symptoms of stress. Whether it's a nervous stomach, trembling hands, difficulty sleeping, nervous twitches, overeating or repeatedly calling Aunt Edna for advice, at some point our stress may cause some unpleasant reactions (no offense to Aunt Edna).

Sure, stress is a normal part of life, and affects people differently. However, it's clear that too much stress can overload our coping mechanisms and result in stress side effects.

Types of Stress

Stress can be put into one of two categories: mental or physical. Mental stress is characterized by such things as worries over money or a loved one's health, loss of a loved one or losing a job. Physical stressors include a lack of sleep, poor diet or the effects of an illness.

And then there are the "stealth type" stressors that seem to be the ones that put people over the edge: Running around to make sure everyone in the family gets to their game on time, making sure little Fluffy had his shots, pleading with Uncle Chuck to take care of himself, and so on. These stressors fall under a category known as obligations.

What's a Body to Do?

Remember when the bully next door used to scare you? If it's been too many years since that's happened, here's a reminder as to what your body did in response to this extra stress. First, your heart rate increased in order to pump more blood to your muscles in case you needed to sprint away. Next to go into hyperdrive were your blood pressure, breathing and metabolism. Basically, your body went into full-scale alert so it could act quickly and effectively to a high-pressure or threatening situation, what's known as "the fight-or-flight response."

Now picture yourself in this heightened state of alert over many hours of each day and you'll understand

why stress turns into distress. The balance of your daily stressors is out of whack with your abilities to cope with them. Your body simply cannot sustain this type of stress without some sort of side effect, whether it's tension headaches, stiff upper-back muscles or trouble sleeping. And if the stressors cannot be decreased or addressed in a healthy manner, your body may experience such health problems as high blood pressure and heart disease.

Coping Techniques for a Healthier You

I know a mother who saw the movie *Castaway* and wanted a prescription for a one-way trip to that deserted island. OK I said, but first, let's explore some other options. To be sure, all of us handle stress in our own ways. Some of us are able to handle quite a bit of it, while others go ballistic if our pizza comes without the mushrooms we ordered. But there are some healthy ways to deal with whatever life stressors come your way.

Here are some recommendations from the National Mental Health Association to help you reduce and cope with stress. Some may help right away, while others may take a bit of time. It's important to give these techniques a tincture of time, determination and persistence, while knowing your choices include accepting or changing the situation, as well as your responses to it.

- **Be Realistic.** If you feel overwhelmed by some activities, learn to say no! You may be taking on more responsibility than you can handle at the time.
- **Shed the Superman/woman Costume.** No one is perfect. Give yourself a break. Reach a balance about what really needs to be done and don't hesitate to ask for help if you need it. Also be willing to make adjustments when necessary (So you leaped over a crack in the sidewalk instead of a tall building. So what? You tried your best).
- **Don't Look Too Far Ahead.** Doctor Mom always said to "take one thing at a time." This philosophy can do wonders for people under stress. Sometimes even everyday, ordinary work can seem out of control. If this occurs, focus on one task at a time, not the whole basket. Little steps are a lot easier to take than one big leap.
- **Be Flexible.**
Ahh, those yoga instructors are right. You can tell a person's age not by years, but by flexibility. Don't stand on stubbornness. If you know you're right, stand firm, but be calm and rational. However, also be willing to listen to other's opinions and compromise if possible. If you're willing to give a little, the other person may do the same. The result may be a better solution.
- **Take Time-Outs.** Schedule time to do the things you enjoy.
- **Exercise.** Yes, I know you have heard repeatedly that exercise is an effective tool to address many health conditions. But you know what? Twenty to 30 minutes throughout the day of some type of exercise may relieve that extra tension and stress.
- **Lead a Healthy Lifestyle.** Good nutrition can make a difference. The fuel you eat will influence the way you feel. It's true — an apple a day keeps the medical professional away.
- **Tap Into Your Spirituality.** I'm not one to preach, but I can tell you that many people enjoy the peace of mind that comes with minding their spirituality.
- **Go Easy With Criticism.** Don't be so hard on your spouse, significant other, child, boss or coworker if they do not measure up to your standards. Everyone is unique, has their own strengths and shortcomings and their own "luggage" from their life experiences.
- **Communicate.** Share feelings, talk. You may not be the only one having a bad day. Also, keep in touch with friends and family.
- **Get a Massage.** How would you like to work for a company that offers its employees a 15-minute chair massage at the workplace? Wouldn't that be a nice and inexpensive way to show appreciation? What a great way to release the stress of a hectic day and reinforce the benefits of "the power of touch."

- **Be a Volunteer.** Helping others is a great way to get your mind off your worries and channel your energy into something positive. I know we really depend upon volunteers at the hospitals for many activities, including meals on wheels and visiting patients.
- **Consider Counseling.** Many people feel uneasy when this is suggested, but please don't. There are many fine highly trained professionals to get you back on track. Perhaps hypnotherapy, biofeedback, or even medication will be used. Remember, it's not a sign of weakness to get help, but a sign of strength — because you're helping yourself.
- **Eat Chocolate.** I knew this would get your attention. I don't know about any scientific evidence that it reduces stress, but it sure tastes good! OK, this may sound a bit much, but it is important to treat yourself every now and then. Just a little bit can go a long way, but watch that waistline! You don't want to add any weight concerns to the stress mix.

The bottom line is this: please don't let anxiety ruin your day. For further information on strategies to reduce stress and improve your personal stress management techniques, please speak with your healthcare professional.

Copyright 2003, Dr. Rob Danoff

Robert Danoff, D.O., M.S., is a family physician. He is program director of Family Practice Residency Frankford Hospitals, Jefferson Health System, Philadelphia, Pa. He also is a medical correspondent for The Comcast Network, CN8, contributing writer to the New York Times and writes a weekly medical column for the Bucks Courier Times, Bucks County Pa.

[« back](#)

Picture: DCI |

By visiting this site, you agree to the terms and conditions of our [Visitor Agreement](#). Please read. [Privacy Policy](#).

[Copyright © 2007](#) Discovery Communications

The leading global real-world media and entertainment company.